



TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Response to the Independent Ombudsman Second Quarter Report, FY 2021 June 3, 2021

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has received the FY 2021 Second Quarter Report from the Office of Independent Ombudsman (OIO), and provides this response and updates to ongoing agency efforts.

TJJD COVID-19 Update

During the Second Quarter, TJJD began offering COVID-19 vaccines to staff consistent with the guidance from the CDC and Department of State Health Services (DSHS). TJJD wants to thank its partners at the DSHS, the Texas Division of Emergency Management, and its healthcare provider at the University of Texas Medical Branch for all their efforts in securing the vaccines for allocation to TJJD staff. The first wave of vaccines were provided to staff members who had health conditions that placed them at high-risk for complications with COVID-19, as well as those who were directly involved with the COVID-19 mitigation protocols, such as the Special Tactics and Response Team and the Quarantine Response Teams. Both of these groups were trained specifically to provide direct-care supervision for the youth on the medical dorms who had contracted COVID-19. TJJD continues outreach and vaccination efforts for staff and youth in accordance with guidance from the CDC and DSHS.

While vaccinating youth and staff is now the best line of defense against the spread and impact of COVID-19, TJJD continues to enforce other adopted precautions. These include temperature and health screenings for staff, visitors, and contractors; requiring masks for staff providing direct-care services to youth within facilities and halfway houses; testing for staff and youth when a high-risk contact is identified; and keeping group sizes in the facilities as small as possible. These measures have proven their effectiveness, as TJJD has maintained low number of COVID-19 cases in all facilities since February 2021.

TJJD also resumed in-person visitation during the Second Quarter, following updated guidance from DSHS and other state partners. While virtual visitation has proven to be an important tool to provide youth connection with their families and mentors, nothing can truly replace in-person visitation. Both of these visitation opportunities will continue.

Incident Trends

The Average Daily Population for TJJD facilities decreased by less than two percent from the First Quarter to the Second Quarter in FY 2021. However, incidents involving OC spray decreased by nine percent, youth-on-youth assaults decreased eleven percent, and youth-on-staff assaults decreased 14 percent. Despite the increase in restraints within the Phoenix Program—as

noted by the OIO, a program for the most aggressive youth in TJJD's care—overall incidents involving restraints during the Second Quarter increased by only two percent, or 24 total incidents.

Assaults reported as unauthorized contact (i.e., non-injurious incidents) accounted for the majority (79%) of all youth-on-staff assaults reported during this Quarter. Regardless of injury to youth or staff, all incidents coded as assaults or unauthorized contact require timely level II due process hearings with the expectation that, if proven true, the youth responsible are appropriately held accountable through the agency's violence intervention continuum. This continuum is comprised of the Intensive Intervention Program, the Redirect Program, and the Phoenix Program and provides targeted behavior modification programming for continually assaultive or highly aggressive youth. High-level staffings occur to ensure the youth are properly placed within these programs, and regular discussions between senior agency leadership, facility leadership, and the hearing specialist are held to ensure the hearings processes are working as intended and corrective actions are quickly implemented if inconsistencies are identified.

Texas Model implementation updates

TJJD continues implementation of the Texas Model, emphasizing on keeping youth as shallow in the juvenile justice system as possible; providing necessary, adequate, and targeted treatment; and conducting services through a trauma-informed approach. During the Second Quarter, TJJD orchestrated a training for over 140 TJJD and juvenile probation staff in the first-ever juvenile justice specific practitioner training in Trust-Based Relational Intervention. TJJD is also providing training to case managers and agency treatment staff in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). Additionally, with the sustained low numbers in COVID-19 cases across TJJD facilities, the department recommitted its efforts to concurrent treatment methodologies and allowed youth to engage in more pull-out groups.

The agency also transitioned to new Youth Service Team meetings, which have proven to be successful in regularly reviewing youth progress since implemented as a pilot program in 2020. The Youth Service Team is responsible for developing youth case plans, assessing and encouraging youth programming progress, and consistently reviewing the youth's readiness for transition and step-down opportunities. These meetings are crucial to the agency's goal in providing the proper dosage of treatment and services to youth at the right setting, and only keeping youth in a high-restriction setting for the time absolutely necessary for their treatment goals and public safety.

TJJD also continued to engage agency stakeholders during the Second Quarter as the Texas Legislative Session began in January 2021. Several meetings were held to engage legislative staff and members on the Texas Model Plan for Reform and the agency's Legislative Appropriations Request. Both of these items remain on TJJD's website and will be continually built upon as the agency enters the Texas Sunset process and the 2023 Legislative Session.

TJJD appreciates this opportunity to respond and provide an update to the OIO's FY 2021 Second Quarter report. Our agencies will continue to work closely to improve services for the youth across the juvenile justice system.